

22 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

historian undertook to make us intimately acquainted with a man singularly dark and inscrutable,—with a man whose real disposition long remained swathed up in intricate folds of factitious virtues, and over whose actions the hypocrisy of his youth, and the seclusion of his age, threw a singular mystery.¹

Here, as in the case of his remarks on Thucydides, Macaulay's admiration for some particular quality in the author he estimates reveals his own ideals. The perfect historian must unite the narrative skill of Thucydides with the power of Tacitus to penetrate, to realise, and to depict persons. At the same time, there were certain qualities which the ancient historians did not possess, but the ideal historian should possess. In the latter part of the essay, Macaulay turned to consider the moderns. He felt that they surpassed their predecessors in two ways. They were far more strict in their adherence to truth than most of the Greek and Roman writers. They did not insert imaginary speeches, conversations, or descriptions. But their chief superiority lay in another direction. In the philosophy of history, the moderns had very far surpassed the ancients. The natural growth of knowledge accounted for something, but it would not altogether account for their 'immense superiority' in this respect. The cause was the constant

progress of the human intellect due to the
substitution of
progressive for stationary societies, the
breadth and
variety of modern civilisation compared to the
exclusive-
ness and narrowness of ancient civilisation,
and other
general causes. ' Hence it is, that, in
generalisation, the
writers of modern times have far surpassed
those of an-
tiquity. The historians of our own country are
unequalled
in depth and precision of reason ; and even
in the works

¹Ibid. pp. 350-1.